

## Satire on Learning and the Type of the Pedant in Eighteenth-Century Literature

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### Abstract

The paper discusses a series of 18<sup>th</sup>-century works which may be included in a genre sometimes referred to as ‘satire on learning’, and, more specifically, which feature a particular character type—the pedant. The genre has not received much critical attention, so the paper will simply attempt to build a corpus of works integrating that genre—which, hopefully, may be expanded by later research and contributions to the topic—by establishing a series of links among them. In carrying out this task, this paper will (1) focus on the existence of English, French and Spanish works which testify to the European dimension of the genre and to a shared critical conception of learning as pedantry. It will then (2) draw a composite portrait of the central figure, the pedant (also called virtuoso, learned wit, erudite dunce), who gives unity to the works themselves and to the genre as a whole. It will finally (3) suggest lines of research which may render the topic interesting and fruitful.

The so-called *tradition of learned wit* has been studied in English literature because of its relation and contribution to major works and authors, basically Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* but also some of Swift’s and Pope’s masterpieces.<sup>1</sup> As a comparison of these books with their learned sources makes clear, a distinction should be drawn within this larger tradition between genuine works of erudite lore such as Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) or Thomas Browne’s *Vulgar Errors* (1646), to name but two of the most outstanding and widely known exemplars, and works such as those by Swift, Pope or Sterne, which draw their themes and materials from that tradition but use them for satiric purposes. This second kind of works can be considered to be something more articulated and specific than a *tradition*, that is to say, a genre, which has been occasionally referred to as *satire on learning*, since it is basically a critique of erudition and abuses in learning, featuring for this purpose a particular character type, that of the pedant (sometimes called *virtuoso*) and certain themes and forms associated with this type.

This genre of satire on learning is not restricted to eighteenth-century English literature: there are some interesting—even if minor or half-forgotten—examples of it in eighteenth-century European literature outside Britain. In this European context, however, the genre has not received, to my knowledge, much critical attention. So, at the initial stage of research on the topic that these remarks are intended to illustrate, it may not be irrelevant to build an expanded and international corpus of works by establishing a series of links among them. These links are founded on a *textual*—and not *contextual*—basis. In other words, they are documented through an examination of certain texts in different languages and the features which recur in them, through relations of affinity and analogy which point to—but do not necessarily imply—actual contact or influence, and not through a demonstration of these latter. In fact we may be confronted by one of those cases in which coincidences are explained by similarities in separate or even independent

intellectual and cultural climates, by historical and literary processes that are not bound by particular national frontiers, rather than by *rappports de fait*. These are the cases which allow comparative literature to transcend these *rappports de fait* as its only legitimate basis, perhaps to the regret of some traditionalists.

In carrying out this task, this paper will (1) focus on the existence of English, French and Spanish works which testify to the European dimension of the genre and to a shared critical conception of learning as pedantry. It will then (2) draw a composite portrait of the central figure, the pedant, virtuoso, learned wit, or erudite dunce, who gives unity to the works themselves and to the genre as a whole, and it will demonstrate his indebtedness to the Quixotic figure. And, it will finally (3) suggest lines of research which may render the topic interesting and fruitful, it will hint how this genre may be explored through a comparative approach which should highlight its supranational dimension and permanence through different periods and ages, and at the same time underscore the differences arising from different contexts, both temporal and spatial.

### 1. Eighteenth-Century Pedantry

Pedantry and abuses of learning seem to be a characteristic eighteenth-century disease, or at least a characteristic eighteenth-century literary topic, although their literary ancestors must unquestionably be sought in Rabelais and Cervantes, and there are also some seventeenth-century predecessors.<sup>2</sup> (Of course the possibility that the authors drew on certain real-life models of the time, not very different from the ones we can still spot among us in university departments, seminars and conferences, cannot be altogether discarded.) This efflorescence of pedantry in the eighteenth century is made clear by a brief overview of eighteenth-century works dealing with this topic, many of them featuring Quixotes of learning.

(a) The most universal and accomplished Quixotic pedant is of course Walter Shandy in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1767), but, antedating Sterne, there are other minor or less-known works which make use of this figure to carry out their satire on learning. In England the most significant predecessor in so far as he makes explicit the Quixotic connection through his obvious imitation of the Don, is the religious pedant of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663, 1664, 1678). Butler was also the author of two works showing the same satirical approach to learning, *The Elephant in the Moon* and *Satire in Two Parts upon the Imperfections and Abuse of Human Learning* (both written c. 1670-71, but published posthumously in the eighteenth century). And he also produced characters and fragments in which he sketches types and situations which bear the imprint of this genre. But type and genre come to their prime in the works produced by the members of the so-called Scriblerus Club (which included Swift, Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot and Parnell).<sup>3</sup> Swift had published *A Tale of a Tub* in 1704, undoubtedly one of the cornerstones of the genre, but it is to the joint authorship of the club that we owe the most representative and significant, if not polished or accomplished in literary terms, exemplar of the genre, the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (published in 1741 but written between 1714 and 1727). To the feigned authorship of Martinus Scriblerus were ascribed other works actually written by members of the club such as *Annus Mirabilis* (1722), *Peri Bathous: Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728), *Virgilius Restauratus* (1729), the critical apparatus to Pope's *Dunciad* known as the *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), or *The Origin of Sciences* (1732), among others. Of course *The Dunciad* itself (1728, 1729, 1742, 1743) and its most immediate antecedent, Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1682), exhibit the critique of false or misapplied learning characteristic of the genre, and so do certain chapters of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), especially in the third part, where Gulliver narrates his experience in Laputa and describes

the Academy of Projectors at Lagado. The work as a whole, according to Kerby-Miller (1988), was conceived by Swift as the travels of Martinus Scriblerus, and Gulliver's quixotic behaviour at the end of the narrative seems also to corroborate this statement. And we may also add the presence of the type in other literary forms, such as journalism (Tom Folio in the essays of *The Tatler*) and drama: the protagonist of Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676) is an evident forerunner of the eighteenth-century pedant, who is the protagonist—Dr Fossile—of the collaborative Scriblerian farce (by Pope, Arbuthnot, and mainly by Gay) *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717). Finally, we must bear in mind that the pedant may have an episodic appearance in works which are not basically satires on learning, for example the two pedantic tutors of the hero in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Thawckum and Square, the pedant Mr Selvin who is ridiculed by the protagonist at a certain point of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), or the astronomer encountered by the hero of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759).

(b) As has been remarked above, satire on learning does not seem to be an exclusive English creation, although it can be argued that the genre produced its best and its most on English soil. Certain French and Spanish works testify to the supranational dimension of satire on learning. The French instances are perhaps less known than the English ones and include the *Histoire de Monsieur Ouffle*, by the Abbé Laurent Bordon (1710), featuring one of the earliest Quixotes of learning, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre d'un Inconnu* (1714), by Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, or the *Mémoires de l'Académie de Troyes* (1744), by Pierre-Jean Grosley. In Spain, besides the well known and Shandean protagonist of Father Isla's novel *Fray Gerundio de Campazas* (1758 and 1768), one may add works such as *Los Eruditos a la violeta* (1772), by José Cadalso, or Pedro Centeno's *Don Quijote el Escolástico* (1788 and 1789), which was preceded by a periodical entitled *El apologista universal* (1786-1788), also by the same author and featuring mock or ironic reviews supposedly written by a defender of scholastic and traditional learning. Of course there is no reason why there may not be more satires on learning in other European languages, and, once the basic features of the genre are identified, other examples may be certainly spotted in German, Italian, or Portuguese literature.

Perhaps the most important of these basic features, since it is what most of these works share, is the critical presentation of learning as pedantry. In eighteenth-century English newspapers and dictionaries pedantry was defined as *pretence to learning* (and this is the sense we may find, for example, in Cadalso's *Los Eruditos a la Violeta*), that is to say, the exhibition of *false* learning as far as this is superficial or even nonexistent, faked, counterfeited. But, in addition to this, there was another sense of pedantry which implied a more subtle and complex critique of learning, and this is the one defined by Swift when he wrote that

Pedantry is properly the over-rating any kind of knowledge we pretend to ...  
And if that kind of knowledge be a trifle in itself, the pedantry is the greater.  
For which reasons I look upon fiddlers, dancing-masters, heralds, masters of the ceremony, &c. To be greater pedants than Lipsius, or the elder Scaliger.  
(in Kerby-Miller 1988, 268)

In the first sense, pedantry amounts to lack of real learning; in the second one, to an inappropriate or even disproportionate use of it. This double definition of pedantry was not new, though. We may find a similar conception of pedantry one century earlier in Cervantes's novella *El coloquio de los perros*, included in his *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613).

At a certain point in their dialogue, the wise and talkative dogs Cipión and Berganza, the protagonists of the work, describe abuses of learning in the same twofold fashion:

BERGANZA- ... Hay algunos romancistas que en las conversaciones disparan de cuando en cuando con algún latín breve y compendioso, dando a entender a los que no lo entienden que son grandes latinos, y apenas saben declinar un nombre ni conjugar un verbo.

CIPIÓN – Por menos daño tengo ése que el que hacen los que verdaderamente saben latín, de los cuales hay algunos tan imprudentes que hablando con un zapatero o con un sastre arrojan latines como agua.

BERGANZA – De eso podremos inferir que tanto peca *el que dice latines delante de quien los ignora como el que los dice ignorándolos*. (1982, vol. III, 267-68; emphasis added)

The man who quotes in Latin but in fact lacks a true knowledge of this language (“el que dice latines ... ignorándolos”) illustrates pedantry as pretence to learning; the scholar who uses Latin in an inappropriate context or way (“el que dice latines delante de quien los ignora”) points to pedantry as misuse or simply abuse of learning.

It is this second dimension of pedantry which is more distinctively and thoroughly explored by satire on learning, and the lines of this exploration are suggested to a great extent by Swift’s definition of pedantry quoted above. There are two interesting ideas pointed out by Swift, which recur in many of the works mentioned above. Firstly, the *over-rating of knowledge*, which implies an exaggeration in the place and importance allotted to erudition, or, in other words, the *centrality* of learning. Secondly, *knowledge as a trifle*, which implies an exaggeration of its specialised or restricted nature, that is, the *triviality* of learning. Pedantry is thus attacked as *excess in learning*, as learning becoming too central and too trivial, or, combining both types of abuse, as a disproportion between the excessive value attached to it by the subject and the insignificant nature of the object itself, a disparity between the importance or place attached to it and those inherent in it. Satire results from the comic handling of this disproportion and disparity: erudition is applied to every aspect or area of life, including those clearly hostile to it because of their everyday and ordinary nature (centrality); erudition is made up of obscure, far-fetched, irrelevant knowledge, and is concerned with topics, books, authors, that nobody cares about any more (triviality). The resulting satire is not just a critique of the specific philosophical or scientific system represented by the sources of learning, but of any system which is not adequately understood or properly used, or, in other words, of learning without wisdom, of the misapplication of intelligence; and, furthermore, of an intellectual approach to life, of an attitude that can be summed up as *living by the head*. Satire on learning is thus able to embrace both the topical and the general.

## 2. The Quixotic Pedant

*The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* may be considered the model or paradigm of the genre. The text was conceived as a fictional framework where ridiculous examples of pedantry (commentaries, hypotheses, theories, treatises, etc.) could be inserted, or, in other words, as the biography of a hero whose learned activities and works are a burlesque or parody of erudition and therefore the means of satire on learning. It is not surprising that the hero should turn out to be a Quixotic one (and there is external as well as internal evidence that Pope and his editor Warburton considered Martinus as such),<sup>4</sup> since Cervantes’s character provided a suitable fictional pattern of intellectual folly and literary

mania which was at the root of the pedant's disease. With this Quixotic pattern in mind, we can elaborate the following composite portrait of the pedant:

(a) The pedant, like Don Quixote, is a man infected with a *literary mania*, in this case erudite instead of romance lore. This craze is literary because literature is not only the origins of his learned folly (reading provides the Quixotic pedant with his learning and is therefore a central and defining activity), but also its result, since he also turns his literary learning into writing.

(b) His mania, like the Don's, becomes perceptible in *eccentric undertakings* and nonsensical ventures, in this case again of an erudite instead of a romantic nature, in his life as well as his works, which both display his intellectual approach to the world and how he seeks to impose that literary pattern on the world.

(c) The result of his Quixotic activity is twofold, as in Cervantes's masterpiece. In the first place, this produces a *distortion of reality*, including the perceiving subject himself and his knowledge, and the objects on which that knowledge is applied, be they literary artefacts, abstract problems, or common things. The pedant, like Don Quixote, sees everything framed by an intellectual pattern, through the lenses of his bookish worldview, and these refract a warped image. In the second place, this distortion of reality goes hand in hand with *the burlesque or ridiculing of its sources*. This burlesque is usually the result of a clash of spheres embodied in the pedant's Quixotic activity: the inadequate application of theory to experience, for example of a too elaborate and specialized learning to the most trivial or prosaic aspects of the pedant's life (and also the other way round); or, in the case of his learned works, the disparity between topic and method, for example between the irrelevant or commonplace object of investigation and the effort and sophistication of the investigating subject (and again the reverse situation is also possible).<sup>5</sup>

(d) As a result of this, we can characterise the pedant's distortion of reality by saying that pedantry, like Quixotism, results both in a *simplification of the complexity of life* and in a *complication of the simplicity of life*. The Quixotic pedant constantly tries to fit or even twist reality into a system or theory which is at best a reduction of its intricacy and density, whereas he makes the plainest and most uncomplicated aspects of reality look very complex by applying his erudite lore to them.

These features perfectly describe Martinus, the protagonist of the *Memoirs*, as well as his father Cornelius. The Quixotic character and his biography ridicule learning both through his life itself and through his works. The first case is best illustrated by Cornelius's regulations for the begetting, nourishing and education of his son: he follows the "Rules of the Ancients for the generation of Children of Wit", which include Galen as far as his pregnant wife's diet is concerned and Aristotle's directions for the begetting of a male foetus; on similar grounds, he objects to swaddling and to any kind of constrictions from clothes for the infant; he forbids the nurse to eat beef because, according to the Ancients, once this is incorporated to her milk, it is prejudicial to the baby's mind, and instead gives him the Lacedaemonian black Broth recommended by Lysurgus, which almost kills Martin of a surfeit; he uses all sorts of ordinary things—clothes, toys, food—in a droll and eccentric way—for example, ginger-bread is stamped with the letters of the Greek alphabet—in order to store his child's mind with all sorts of knowledge; finally, he supervises Martin's learned education so that it not only includes traditional disciplines such as rhetoric, logic, or metaphysics—which comprises debates on theses such as "Whether God loves a possible Angel better than an actually-existent fly" or "If angels know things more clearly in the morning"—but also extends it to such unexpected ones like Gymnastics or Dancing, of course always following the Ancients. In addition to this, Cornelius also produces his own works of learning, namely, two treatises on education, *A*

*Daughter's Mirror* and *A Son's Mirror*, and a *Dissertation on Playthings* which traces the origins in Ancient times of some modern plays, and thus legitimates them for his son.

But satire of learning through the pedant's writing rather than through his acting is more characteristic of Cornelius's son, Martinus. In fact we are more familiar with the latter's works than with his life, of which we know only his education and a few scattered episodes. Martin's works can be separated into those simply described in his *Memoirs* and those supposedly published. Within the former category we can list his investigation of the diseases of the mind or *passions* and the theory which associates them with the body and the muscles that express those passions: "if you deprive the Mind of the outward instruments whereby she usually expresseth that Passion, you will in time abate the Passion itself; in like manner as Castration abate Lust" (1988, 131); his enquiry about the seat of the soul, which attains such surprising conclusions as that the soul shifts place according to the several functions of life—thinking, eating, etc.—and to people's different inclinations, sexes, ages and professions; or the unravelling of the legal and moral problems created by his marrying a Siamese twin sharing her sexual organs with her sister, namely, rape, incest and polygamy.<sup>6</sup> Of course we can also include in this category Martin's projects listed in the last chapter of the book. The second category of Martin's works are those which are claimed to have been written and published by Martinus. This is the case of the list of works appended to the end of the book, basically dissertations or learned tracts and editions or annotations of texts. Some of them were works actually published, written by the members of the Scriblerus club and ascribed to Martinus (or by writers whom the Scriblerians intended to ridicule by attributing their works to Martinus), which are listed as "Pieces of Scriblerus (written in his Youth) already published". A second list under the heading "Others not yet published, mentioned in the *Memoirs*", includes works perhaps planned but never published.<sup>7</sup>

As the preceding examples perfectly illustrate, the scheme is essentially the presentation of a hero and his Quixotic exploits in learning, whether in his fictional acting or his fictional writing. The scheme can be traced in Sterne's Walter Shandy (with evident parallels which bespeak influence but which will not be discussed here), and, in fact, most works in the genre follow this pattern, with an emphasis on one or other dimension, that is, on the character or on his works, on fiction or on dissertation. The presentation of pedantry is embodied in the story of the pedant or in the works of the pedant, sometimes in both. The first possibility appears clearly in the Spanish *Fray Gerundio de Campazas* and *Don Quijote el Escolástico*, which narrate, respectively, the Quixotic adventures of a preaching friar full of scholastic oratory and of a Quixotic crusader for scholastic metaphysics. This latter is a self-appointed imitator of the Don who intends to resurrect *peripatetic chivalry* and who, armed with universals, syllogisms, and a rhetorical language which is a parody of scholastic jargon, and fully devoted to Scholastic Philosophy, which he considers his Dulcinea, visits places—a chemical laboratory or a natural history library—and meets characters representing modern philosophy and science, the Enlightenment.

The second trend is evident in the French *Le Chef-d'oeuvre d'un Inconnu* and the *Mémoires de l'Académie de Troyes*, which present, respectively, the extensive and erudite annotation by a learned scholar of a short and rudimentary poem, and the learned dissertations of the members of a fictional academy on such topics as the old practice of defecating in Bois Street in Troyes, the custom of beating one's mistress, or the project for a journey to Spain. The aim of this journey is to verify and validate Grisóstomo's death (a secondary character in *Don Quixote*), which implies establishing its place and date, and hence the true geography and chronology of the Quixotic adventures: the Quixotic connection of the satire on learning is once more evident.<sup>8</sup> As all these examples

demonstrate, the double dimension of the pedant as both fictional character and the author of notes or dissertations, as both object and subject of discourse, allows the satirist to favour either the pole of fiction or the pole of dissertation, and makes him an extraordinarily versatile instrument for satire.

### 3. The Significance of Pedantry

After thus briefly sketching the genre of satire on learning, it only remains to point out why the genre is interesting and worthy of study, what there is to be learned and how we can learn it. Of course the answers to those questions lie beyond the aims and scope of this paper, but at least we can hint at them by suggesting certain lines of research. Perhaps, after tracing the possible contacts and circulation of the different works and the extension of the genre to other languages and literatures, the point of departure should be an almost obvious question: since abuses of learning have always existed and the type of the pedant existed before and exists now, both in reality and in literature, why did satire on learning flourish in the eighteenth century? The answer must obviously be sought in the transitional nature of the age, which was one of conflict between old learning, scholastic and pseudo-scientific knowledge based on authority and religious revelation, on the one hand, and, on the other, the modern forms of knowledge based on reason and experimentation which, under the influence of philosophers and thinkers such as Bacon or Descartes, were emerging in the late seventeenth century as well as in the eighteenth. In this view, the efflorescence of the satire on learning at the time is one more aspect of the Enlightenment and the quarrel between Moderns—with their faith in progress and amelioration—and Ancients—with their contrary theories of degeneration and nature's decay. Curiously enough, satire on learning cannot be consistently aligned with either of these two conflicting parties. In England, for example, the Scriblerians—Pope and Swift most prominently—satirised modern science and learning,<sup>9</sup> whereas in Spain the satire on learning seems to be rather on the side of the Enlightenment and the rejection of Scholasticism and tradition. Certain works, however, are not clearly for one or the other side of the controversy, or indistinctly distribute blows at both of them, and thus seem to aim at a more general or universal target. In addition to this, different works explore different aspects or fields of the quarrel—scientific, philosophic, literary.

Along with this historical and contextual line, research may focus on the texts themselves, and investigate, for example, formal aspects of the genre. Satire on learning, in this sense, is a playground for parody as well as for satire, and, therefore, an excellent field for the analysis of their differences and their interplay, their devices, forms and kinds, and, above all, of the possibilities of the Quixotic figure as a reversible and flexible tool for both. The authors of satires on learning show a very early understanding of those possibilities and how they are founded on the potentiality of Don Quixote as reader. The Quixotic figure is the first literary character whose behaviour is self-conscious as far as it is modelled precisely on literature, on the texts he has read. The inadequacy and folly of such behaviour, dramatised by the conflict between the literary models on which it is patterned and a reality which constantly contradicts them, turns him into a perfect means to perform a parody of those models. And this parody, although this is not exactly the case in Cervantes, may be turned into an instrument for satirising the attitudes, values, worldview, embodied by those literary models or by the Quixotic reader. In either case, the criticism of literature—parody—or of life—satire—is based on an inadequate way of reading—reading fiction as if it were history, reading life as if it were literature—and therefore on a satiric attack on the Quixotic reader, which may be called *satire on the reader*. Some of the texts mentioned above clearly belong to this kind of satire, which they imitate and develop in

several directions, for example by shifting emphasis from Quixotic reading to Quixotic writing.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to this, textual analysis may follow a thematic line and focus on the themes usually related to abuses of learning and erudition as excess such as alienation, lack of communication, isolation, on the one hand, or the limits of knowledge, mistrust of language, scepticism, on the other. The pedant in different works and contexts seems to be an embodiment, in different ways and degrees, of these themes, and this fact points to a universal dimension, to a certain core of anti-intellectualism, which transcends the topical significance of the genre and explains its permanence not only in different languages, but also in different ages. In this sense it is worth noting the development of the genre (although perhaps we should rather speak of its transformation into a mode)<sup>11</sup> beyond the eighteenth century and the apparition of modern descendants of the eighteenth-century pedant. These include, for example, nineteenth-century works such as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) or Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), and twentieth-century characters like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15) and *Ulysses* (1922), or the Quixotic narrator of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962). The scrutiny of the forms and shape of pedantry or the delineation and transformation of the type of the pedant in different works of different ages, in an endless interplay of permanence and change, may be also a task worth undertaking. The last link in this chain of development might be the campus novel, in which erudition and pedantry are set in their most congenial place in the twentieth-century.<sup>12</sup> As these texts show, university—and particularly literary—scholars are perhaps the closest relatives of the eighteenth-century pedant, and this highlights the ultimate lesson we can draw from satire on learning as a whole: it is a commentary on ourselves. In this connection, the study of the genre has an unquestionable advantage over other topics: it is not simply an exercise in literary criticism, but one of self-criticism.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jefferson 1951 and Starkman 1968.

<sup>2</sup> The third book of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published in 1546, centres on Panurge's marriage and includes his consultation of four learned scholars (specialising in theology, medicine, philosophy and law) in order to decide whether he will be made a cuckold by his wife-to-be or not. But the pedant, as will be explained in detail below, also displays an evident Quixotic nature, since he is related to the Cervantean character, as well as to one minor character in *Don Quixote*, the *primo humanista*, who leads the way for the Don to the cave of Montesinos and devotes his life to the writing of erudite books on obscure and far-fetched topics. Panurge's and the *primo humanista*'s abuse of learning exemplifies the two basic follies later embodied by eighteenth-century pedants.

<sup>3</sup> The most complete study of the club, its background, members, activities and works, is the introduction by Charles Kerby-Miller to his edition of *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*.

<sup>4</sup> Kerby-Miller provides the external evidence of the Cervantean influence when he quotes from a letter by Warburton to a friend, dated May 15, 1740 (a year before the *Memoirs* were published), in which he writes that, during a week's visit at Twickenham, he had read with Pope "a pleasant Drole History in imitation of Don Quixote & Sancho to ridicule all



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false Learning. Scriblerus is the Hero & his Man Crambe puns as much as Sancho strings proverbs” (1988, 68). In his edition of the *Memoirs* a decade later, Warburton will insist that the work is a satire on the abuses of human learning “in the manner of Cervantes (the original author of this species of satire) under the history of some feigned adventures” (in Kerby-Miller, 1988, 68). Kerby-Miller concludes that “the general influence of Cervantes on the central project of the club is clear and it seems not unlikely that *Don Quixote* came to mind more than once during, at least, the first planning stage. Cervantes was a favourite author of Swift and probably of several other Scriblerians; and there are some resemblances between the two works, especially in the character of Cornelius, whose reverence for the lore of ancient times and extravagant actions are at times reminiscent of Don Quixote, of which the Scriblerians could hardly have been unconscious” (1988, 68-69). As far as internal evidence is concerned, which Kerby-Miller discusses at the end of this passage and after, this is not the place to point out the numerous echoes of Cervantes’s masterpiece to be found in the *Memoirs*. Suffice it to say that the Quixotic connection is evident both in the presentation of Martinus (his Quixotic appearance suggesting “a decayed gentleman of Spain” and the Quixotic life he leads as a result of his thirst for knowledge) and of his *Memoirs* (written in a manuscript which is lost at a certain point and eventually reaches the reader by means of a narrator who becomes Martinus’s “historiographer”).

<sup>5</sup> We can recognise a certain kinship to the procedures of high and low burlesque, based on the disparity between manner and matter, and widely employed in the eighteenth century. The pedant creates that disparity by means of his misapplication of learning. In this sense, Addison’s definition of these procedures in *The Spectator* 249, quoted by Jump in his study of burlesque, is applicable to the pedant’s activity and the satiric strategies of the satire on learning: “Burlesque is ... of two kinds: the first represents mean persons in the accoutrements of heroes; the other describes great persons acting and speaking like the basest among the people” (1970, 39-40). The pedant both elevates ordinary or prosaic matters and debases serious and important issues by the learned and erudite manner in which he represents them.

<sup>6</sup> All these investigations, as Lund 1989 and Erickson 1965 have demonstrated in their interesting discussions of the *Memoirs*, tackle and criticise the mechanistic and materialistic conception of man defended by authors such as Hobbes and Descartes, and therefore characteristic of modern philosophy and science, which seem to be the butt of Scriblerian satire.

<sup>7</sup> The first group reads as follows: (1) An Essay on the Origin of Sciences, written from the Deserts of Nubia; (2) Peri Bathous: Martinus Scriblerus his Rhetoric, or, Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry; (3) Virgilius Restauratus: Seu Martini Scribleri, summi Critici, Castigationum in Aeneidem Specimen; (4) Annus Mirabilis, or The wonderful Effects of the Conjunction of Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn; (5) The Report of a Case in an Action at Law concerning certain Pyed, or Black and White Horses; (6) Notes and Prolegomena to the Dunciad; (7) Bentley’s Milton. The second group includes: (1) The Case of Queen Esther, with the whole Process of her Purification; (2) An Account of the wonderful Discovery of divers Diseases by Setting-Dogs, with a List of those Gentlemen and Ladies at whom they set; (3) A Proposal humbly offer’d to both Houses of Parliament, for a General Flux; (4) Scriblerus’s Reports of certain extraordinary Cases in Law.

<sup>8</sup> For a full discussion of *Le Chef-d’oeuvre d’un Inconnu* and the *Mémoires de l’Académie de Troyes* as Quixotic satires on learning see Pardo 1998.

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<sup>9</sup> Brean S. Hammond makes this point very clearly in his discussion of Scriblerian satire, which, he argues, “was aimed at the new scientific methodology that was being injudiciously applied (as the Scriblerians thought) to the entire world of learning; at the new ‘professional’ scholars and scientists who were engaged in this falsely rigorous research; and at the prostitution of literary standards that the expression of their conclusion seemed to entail” (1988, 110-11). Hammond also explains Scriblerian satire as a reaction to the transformation of the economics of authorship (from amateur to professional writing, with the ensuing degradation of standards) associated with the emergence of this new learning.

<sup>10</sup> The earliest text in English—or in any language—to show an awareness of the possibilities of this kind of satire is the seventeenth-century Quixotic play by Francis Beaumont *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613). For an analysis of this play as a Quixotic satire on the reader and of the interplay of parody and satire, which could be extrapolated in similar terms to many Quixotic satires on learning, see Pardo 1999.

<sup>11</sup> I am using the distinction between kind (which implies the presence of certain formal features which define that kind) and mode (which refers to the presence of certain non-formal features in other kinds, and therefore a slighter and less defined generic identity) formulated by Fowler 1982.

<sup>12</sup> See in this respect Gutleben 1995, which links the campus novel to a related and older satiric tradition, that of academic satire.

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